

BIG SANDY NEWS.

(Copyright, Secured. All Rights Reserved.)

Driven From Sea to Sea;

Or, JUST A CAMPIN'.

BY C. C. POST.

PUBLISHED BY PERMISSION OF J. R. DOWNEY & CO., PUBLISHERS, CHICAGO.

CHAPTER XXIV.—CONTINUED

And they had good neighbors, which added much to the pleasantness of their surroundings, for though never content to be separate from each other even for a day, our young friends enjoyed having their acquaintances drop in on them, and often visited among their neighbors, spending the evening or Sunday afternoon.

They heard regularly from Lucy's parents, and quite frequently from Jennie and her husband, who were still in Chicago and doing well. At least Erastus had steady employment, and they were comfortable and happy.

Mr. and Mrs. Parsons had now fully decided to sell their home on the mountain at the first opportunity, and move to the Slough, their out-of-the-way location a one operating against the ready sale of the place.

Meantime Erastus and Lucy worked on.

The size of orchard and vineyard was increased by the planting of other trees and vines. Rose bushes were set out at the corners of the porch and beneath the windows, and evergreens and flowering shrubs in the front yard.

The main irrigating ditch had long been completed the year before, the work of carrying the water wherever needed, by means of small side ditches, was comparatively easy and rapid, so that some pretty broad fields of grain and grass were beginning to stretch away on every side of their cottage.

But now came a terrible rumor.

It was told doubtfully at first, as something that could hardly be possible—that a railroad company laid claim to the lands about the Slough, and would compel payment of the present market value, all improvements included, or evict the homesteaders from possession.

The settlers generally laughed at the tale, as being started by some one for the purpose of giving them a fright.

"What!" they said, "the railroad company claim our lands! Why, the land was absolutely valueless, thought not to be worth paying taxes on, until we irrigated it and built houses and put out orchards and vineyards."

"Besides, the land grant by Congress was made to a company whose charter fixed the line of their road more than a hundred miles away, on the other side of a range of mountains; and even this grant the company has forfeited long ago, the time in which the road was to be built in order to obtain the land having expired two years since, and the road is not built yet."

It seemed absurd for anybody to talk about a railroad company having a claim to their lands, when they had redeemed them from the desert, and were almost ready to prove up on them under the Homestead and Pre-emption

laws.

Yet there were those who were less easily disarmed of fear.

They knew that in Iowa a railroad company had dispossessed settlers who had actually proved up and received deeds to their homes from the Government.

There were those among them, too, who had suffered from the overflow of hydraulic mines, others from the Suscol Ranch, and yet others who had suffered from encroachments of corporations in other States and other portions of this State, and these were prepared to believe that nothing was too preposterous for the railroad company to claim, if its officers thought there was the remotest chance of enforcing it, either by fair means or foul.

When Erastus Hemmingway heard the rumor his heart sunk, for he had seen too much of the heartlessness and greed of corporations not to fear the worst, and he at once took steps to ascertain the truth.

He wrote to the headquarters of the company, repeating what he had heard, and asking if there was any truth in the statement that the company professed to have any claim to the land in the vicinity of the Slough.

In reply he received a letter and also a circular.

The letter was signed by the President of the railroad company, and was to the effect that the company hoped to be allowed the original grant of lands made by Congress in aid of the road, but the boundaries of the grant had not been determined, and probably would not be for some time.

Meanwhile, the letter went on to say, the settlers could be assured that in no case should they be the losers, as, if it should eventually be determined that the land which they occupied was within the limits of the grant to the road, the company pledged itself to transfer it to the occupants, on payment of the Government price, and attention was called to the accompanying circular, copies of which the letter said, were being issued and distributed all over the State for the purpose of inducing people to take up land at the Slough. This circular also contained a pledge that if found to be within the grant of Congress to the road, the company would transfer the land to whoever had improved it immediately on payment of the Government price.

This letter, taken in connection with the circulars which were scattered freely among the settlers, if it did not remove all feeling of fear from the minds of Erastus and a few others, did serve to allay the general alarm, which was before on the increase, and improvements went on as usual.

The circulars of the company sent to other portions of the State had the desired effect, and very soon other families began to come in in considerable numbers, all taking up claims and relying upon the printed pledges of the company that in no case should the land cost more than the price asked by Government for wild lands.

It was a good omen.

And now those who came first to the Slough began to reap abundantly of the fruit of their labor and perseverance.

The work of turning a veritable desert into a garden had been accomplished.

It had been done, too, without capital, and by men who were forced to support themselves and their families while the transformation was being made.

Orchards and vineyards were loaded with fruit. Oranges and apples, peaches, plums, apricots, pears, pine-apples, lemons, pomegranates, nectarines—all the semi-tropical fruit, and some which grow nowhere else outside of the tropics themselves, were to be found in full bearing upon the irrigated lands of the settlers at Mussel Slough.

Green fields grew broader and greener. Little flocks and herds of cattle and sheep were to be seen feeding on the rich vegetation which came with the water that overspread the land from the system of irrigating ditches; and as the result of all this, new and pretty cottages were taking the place of the wretched huts in which nearly all had been forced to live during the first years of their residence; and it was in the midst of this prosperity, when want had been banished by years of patient, persevering toil, and they were rejoicing over troubles past, and the thought that for the rest of their days they could take life easy, that the stroke came which turned all their joy into mourning, and changed the current of their blood from the peaceful flow of quiet, happy hearts to a seething flood in hearts made hot with fear and hate.

This was no rumor from an unknown source that reached their ears, awaking doubt in some and ridicule in others. It was not the faint murmuring of a distant storm that might never reach them, but the sudden rush of the whirlwind; the flash of the lightning, the falling of the thunderbolt from a sunny sky. It came as a notice from the railroad company to each settler, informing him that he was a trespasser on the lands of the company, and must immediately vacate, unless he was prepared to pay the value of the lands occupied by him, which had been carefully appraised, so the notice read, by competent judges, whose estimate of the value of each quarter-section accompanied the notice.

This appraisal ranged from ten to thirty-five dollars per acre; that of Erastus Hemmingway being thirty dollars per acre, or a total of four thousand eight hundred dollars, which he was asked to pay to the railroad company for the land he had redeemed from the desert or failing therein was ordered to at once vacate the premises.

The excitement which the receipt of these notices caused can be imagined.

To acts of vengeance upon the officers of the company were both loud and frequent, and had they been present, there is no question as to what their fate would have been. Death in some form would unquestionably have been meted out to them.

But they were careful not to be present.

They had deliberately laid, and were now executing, a plan to rob these people of their homes, and they were too cunning to come within reach of their victims while the first hot flush of righteous anger was upon them.

With the power which their immense wealth, the gift of Congress, gave them, they did not fear the courts or the State.

(Continued on next page.)